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PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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AND

POSSIBILITY OF REFORM.

SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 4, 1869.

I WISH to read, and comment upon, the narrative, or a part of the narrative, contained in the 32d chapter of Genesis.

It is one period of the life of Jacob, one of the patriarchs. I love to go back to these old times so different from our own; of another civilization; of a different stage of the development of the human family; with a household organized after a different pattern; before the day when there were churches; while as yet there were no schools, no books, scarcely a manuscript—in the early twilight day. There is something good in getting out of familiar life, which at last tends to vulgarize the feelings. I remember full well how, in summers, after the heat set in, I have betaken myself to the mountain country, and climbed to the top of some high mountain, some Mount Washington. With what an inexpressible delight I sat in its stillness, far above the circumjacent land, far above the city, the village, the hamlets, and looked out and down upon all these things which seemed to me like a vision and a dream! And to sit alone, and to look at these, was itself a refreshment and a profit to my spirit greater than I can describe. Somewhat in the same way it affects me to go back to these early periods of the human family, to get apart from that which is familiar, and look out again from this distant stand-point over the life which we are now living.

You are familiar with the history of Esau and Jacob. You wil recollect how, by birthright, Esau, by the custom of his country, should have had precedence; how by the craft of Jacob's mother, in collusion with himself, Esau was defrauded of his birthright; how Jacob inherited his father's blessing, and the wrath of his justly incensed brother; and how he was obliged to make haste and flee out of the house and out of the country, and to become an exile for some years in Syria.

It strikes a great many persons with surprise that Jacob the supplanter should have been the chosen of God. There is a certain

LESSON: Psalm xxxii. HYMNS, (Plymouth Collection): 199, 732, 1358.

rough, blunt audacity, there is a certain ready courage in Esau—a kind of prompt vigor, somewhat allied to honesty, which at first attracts toward him. And one thinks that such a hearty fellow as he was, should have been allowed to stand in his own place; and that that sneaking, crawling, crafty, politic, Machiavellian Jacob should never have been permitted to have his own way. And that God chose this managing politician, and made him the patriarch, setting aside this robust, honest fellow of the wilderness, strikes a great many persons with surprise. And if it had turned on religious character, it might have admitted of a question as to whether the choice was all that we should have made. But I think before the history of the evening is finished, you will find that in Jacob there were elements of character which, though they were developed later, were far more noble. They were late in coming up; but their fruit was worth the waiting for.

The true answer to this marvel is, that God selects men for his work on earth, not on account of their personal agreeableness, but on account of their adaptation to the work that they have to perform. A man may be a most pleasant companion in the household, but a poor general in the field. A general that leads an army through difficulties Herculean to success may be, after all, a very disagreeable messmate. A man's companionable qualities—his society qualities—may be of one kind, and yet his talent and adaptations to a work which Divine Providence has in hand may be eminent.

Now, the object in this case was, to establish a nation. There was to be brought up a great seed to Abraham. They were to be established; and out of them was to issue the moral culture of the globe—as it has. From the Greek, the æsthetic and the intellectual; from the Roman, the practical and the juridical; from the Hebrew, the moral, life of the world was yet to come: and the choice between these two persons for this work was to be determined by the question, not Which has the most impetuous audacity—that was not favorable—but Which has the organizing power? Which has the comprehensiveness of mind? Which has the patience, the wisdom, the forecast? Which has the ripening quality? If one was as good in the beginning as Esau was, as ever he would be—and his goodness was of a very low character, good for a hunter or a partisan chief—how poor would he have been standing in the place of an organizer of a great posterity! But although Jacob was a man of many failings and of deep transgressions, yet with them he had a forecast, a shrewdness, a persevering wisdom, an organizing power, that pointed him out as the statesman. And so he was selected, not because in every respect his disposition was the best, but because he was the best instrument to execute the purpose which God had in

view. The same thing is taking place continuously. God employs for his purposes instruments which are adapted to those purposes, although they may not be persons that are in harmony with God's holiness.

The crime which he committed against his brother banished him. He was obliged to leave his father's house in great haste. He went to his mother's relations, and formed a connection of service with Laban. He left his father's house, but he did not leave his crime behind him. That followed him. Seven years he served for the daughter of Laban, whom he loved. And when at the end of seven years she was given to him, behold it was her sister Leah—not Rachel. He was cheated. The cheater was cheated. He had left home seven years before; and these seven years seemed as a day to him. Because he loved the damsel, and was serving her, these years passed quickly by. It is astonishing how fast time flies on the feet of love. But he was cheated. He was paid in the very same coin that he had been using at home. Men do not leave their misdeeds behind them when they travel away from home. A man that commits a mean and wicked action carries that sin in himself and with himself. He may go round the world, but it goes round with him. He does not shake it off by changing his position.

Fourteen years he tarried there and played the same craft on Laban in another way that Laban had played on him. So cheating begets cheating. Craft begets craft again. Men that are overreaching are overreached. Only Jacob was a little too smart for him. He won the second daughter. Then they could no longer dwell in peace together, and it soon became necessary that he should leave. Accordingly, arrangements were made, and they separated their flocks and herds. His family had now become somewhat large, and he journeyed back again toward his father's land. He had passed through twenty years of exile. That was a great many years. It ought to have worn off a great deal, and buried a great deal. But when he set his face to go back again to his father's land, the very first experience almost that he had, was the shadow of a great fear, lying right across his path. It was the shadow of that brother Esau.

It is at this point that we take up the narrative of the thirty-second chapter of Genesis. "And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother, unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom," whither Esau had gone; and he became, you know, the father of the Edomites. "And he commanded him, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau."

This is a man that had stolen the birthright, and made himself the chief. He is returning to his country; and his very first act is to as-

sume the manners of a servant, and to bow down, recognizing the chieftainship of his brother. Such transformations fear makes.

"Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau, Thy servant Jacob saith thus: I have sojourned with Laban and staid there until now, and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men-servants, and women-servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight."

You see the same worldly traits both in their good and in their bad aspects, as you will have occasion to trace them all the way through this evening. You will see how he humbles himself, almost crouching. And yet you will see how provident he was. He left nothing to chance. He did not, as the reckless Esau would have done, say, "Let danger take care of itself; when danger comes, I will be there too, and I will confront it." Jacob was all forethought. He was never caught doing any thing at haphazard. He was shrewd, keen, far-reaching; and he said to himself, as he started to go back to his father's land, and that fear which he had left there, "How know I what shall befall me? To be sure I am rich and great; but my brother is a man of war, and I see that it is necessary to conciliate him." He sent messengers to Esau. But these messengers received a curt reply, evidently. They did not report it; and I suspect that it was such as they did not care to report. For it is recorded that the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." A good many, too many! He did not like that part. Jacob came with his wives, with his children, with his camels, with his asses, with his oxen, with his mules, and with his flocks of sheep; but Esau came with four hundred men. That was altogether too courteous! That fear which had already cast its darkness upon him now became anguish. Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; for with all that man's faults he was a man of exquisite affections. How many men you see like that! How many men you see who are outside scarcely less than the chestnut burr for sharpness and for ruggedness, and who yet carry in them hidden a very tender heart! And how many shrewd, soft-tongued, pliable-lipped men there are! How many there are that you learn to dislike! How many there are that you learn to hate almost, until you see their family life! When you see what beauties there are in bad men, oftentimes you love them for their good traits. In this world, good and bad are strangely mixed together. There are very few characters that are simple and perfect—either perfectly bad or perfectly good. And Jacob had a very tender heart. "He was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks and herds, and the camels, into two bands." For

you see that his distress was not so great but that after all the politic manager came out again. And he said to himself, in the midst of his distress, "Let me be up and doing." He thought like a general, and said, "I will divide my property. I will not invest all, so that one stroke shall destroy the whole of it. I will put it in such a shape that if one half goes, I will make off with the other half." At least he was not so distressed but that he could think. He "was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks and herds, and the camels, into two bands."

It seems a little strange to see this rude conjunction of circumstances. Modern society teaches us to put stuffing between things that are good and things that are bad which lie close together. And we put *phrases* between them. Here Jacob's affliction, his soul-tempest, is described; and in the very same line it is said that he divided his camels, and his sheep, and his oxen. That blunt and unsmoothing way belongs to the simplicity of an earlier life. It would be better, I think, if we introduced something of it into the periphrastic way of our life.

"And he said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape."

What do you suppose, now, in this moment, he thought of? He thought of all the advantage which he gained by his craft and treachery to his brother. Do not you suppose that in this moment he would have given all his possessions to have been quit of his old wrong, and to have been at peace again? After fourteen years, one single act of his life was alive, and stood up before him on the precincts of the promised land —an act that now was revengeful and threatening. And all his prosperity in that moment trembled in his hand, and was like to have been lost. The half of it he was willing to part with. Peradventure, the whole of it would go. And yet, in the midst of all this, he is shrewd and self-possessed. Fear, and then calmness; anguish, and then again management. This fluctuation, how extremely natural it is in a moment of suspense! For of all things in this world there is nothing so painful as suspense. Come shame, a man can bear that, only let it come. But to wonder whether it will come; to lie awake at night; to wake at midnight; to wake at early morning; and still to think, "Will it?" To calculate the chances, and say, "Stop this bitter calculation;" and to put it down again, and again, and again, and never have it quit—oh! this is a suspense which is like a thousand hells. And here was this man kept in this fiery state, waiting to know what should be developed; wondering if he should be bereft of his household, and if his property should be swept away; wondering if his brother would be peaceable. Doubtless there were run-

ning through his mind all these possibilities. If he is, then what? And if he is not, then what? It was this fiery swinging from one side to another that was the chastisement of the Lord indeed.

But now we come to the first step of that great change which passed upon Jacob at this time—for he had reached a crisis, as I shall show, in his life's history, and in his character and disposition.

"And Jacob," after he had done this, "said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee!"

There is something very affecting in the way in which guilty persons invoke the God of their fathers. Conscious that they deserve nothing at the hands of God, they seek to bring down upon themselves the blessings of the God of their father and of their mother. There is many a poor stricken soul that has felt, as for himself, that he scarcely could lift his eyes to heaven; but he has thought of the God of his childhood, and the God of his dear mother, and he has prayed in her name, and in his father's name. And so Jacob—how humble he was before God, or begins to be! He said, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac!" And then, when he mentions himself, he says, "The Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands."

It is strange how a man's prosperity returns to vex him when his sins rise up before him. And his unworthiness before God, and God's mercies to him, deepen his sense of guilt, and of his unworthiness. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." Let the cattle go; but if he should smite me, and the mother, and the children!

When men are overtaken in their transgression, and all their wickedness seems to come down upon them, how true it is that then there rise up before them the concurrent suffering of all their households! A man is in the temptation of business, and the question is, whether he shall draw a note for five thousand dollars, or a series of notes for five thousand dollars, and indorse them with good indorsements; and he says, "I mean nobody any harm; I mean to take them up just as fast as they come round; nobody shall suffer, and I shall get great good." It seems all safe and all right. The first is taken up, and the second is taken up, and the third is taken up, and the fourth one is coming on; and how to meet it is the question. His funds are scattered; his friends are gone, his arrangements are all blighted,

and the hour is drawing near, and there can be no concealment. And in that hour what is it that he thinks of but "My mother, and my father! Oh! how shall I go home and tell my wife? How shall I look on the face of my children? When all my neighbors look me in the face to-morrow, and call me a forger, how shall I look in the face of my beloved ones again?"

How it takes hold of him through his wife, and through his children, and through all that he loves! And how has it been so since the beginning of the world! Hear this old patriarch saying, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." This was a great grief. Few words are recorded; but ah! it was a great grief.

After this prayer, you will see how strangely—not surprisingly, but yet strikingly—back comes his old politic spirit again. "And he lodged there that same night, and took of that which came to his hand, a present for Esau his brother; two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten foals." Now see how shrewd he was. "And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau; and behold also he is behind us." Probably the first present might be very acceptable, but far from doing the work. "And so commanded the second." And he was to repeat the same thing. Doubtless this would still further mollify the raging prince of Edom. "And the third and all that followed the droves, saying, on this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. And say ye, moreover, Behold thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure, he will accept of me."

See this man skulking in the shadow of his sin, and his sin breeding fear, and both of them exciting remorse in him. See how much this man had made by his wrong-doing! For he had struck at the confidence between man and man. He had undermined the very structure on which society stands. He had destroyed faith between brother and brother. It was a great crime, and greatly was he punished for it. "So went the present over before him; and himself lodged that night in the company"—that is, he camped down in the early evening.

And now we approach the great crisis of his life, and the great change which was wrought in him.

"He rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two woman-servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok." A ford from an hour and a half to two hours distant from the river Jordan, and two from the river Sychar. "And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had,"—that is, all the great body of his caravan—and Jacob remained on the one side of the river Jabbok. "Jacob was left alone." And now is introduced in the most sketchy manner, in the most imperfect tracery, one of the most remarkable narrations of the intercourse of the divine with the human that is contained in literature. "Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." What it was I do not know, except that it was an angel-man—the angel of the covenant—that stood in God's place, and was as God to him. That Jacob knew that it was a superior personage there can be no manner of doubt; but as to what this wrestling was—the whole mode of it; we know nothing. Neither here, nor in any subsequent scripture, is there light thrown upon it. He wrestled with the man "until the breaking of the day." "And when he"—that is, the celestial personage—"saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him."

It is very plain that the patriarch understood that the crisis of his life had come. He had prayed to God, and here was the answer to his prayer; and it is very plain that he felt that on his persistent faith depended his whole safety.

"And the angel said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Penuel; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

From this hour Jacob was another man. In the strength of this vision, and in the blessing which he received in this mysterious struggle, he advanced to meet his brother. The hand of the Lord was also upon *him*. Strangely, I probably might say unexpectedly, to Jacob, he met him; and the old boyhood affection returned. They made friends; and they parted, one going one way after the interview, and the other going the other way.

But that to which attention is more especially directed is, that

from this hour Jacob is nowhere recorded as falling back upon his selfish, his politic, his managing career. From this hour out there is no trace of any thing in him but largeness of mind, nobleness of purpose, and beauty of character. All the dross seems to have been purged away. He had met the crisis, and had risen, and gone through it; and he had come out a changed man. And now he was indeed a prince of God, and he was the principal founder of the nation of the Israelites. Esau went back, the wild and the untamed man, the sheik of the desert, with his herds, wandering and plundering every whither. Jacob went, the civilizer, over into he promised land, and there established the economy for which he had been ordained, and lived revered, a beautiful specimen of an old man. And the last scenes of his life were transcendently beautiful.

In view of this narrative, which I have conducted so far, let me say:

Men's sins carry with them a punishment in this life. Different sins are differently punished. The degrees of punishment are not always according to our estimate of the culpability. Many sins against a man's body go on in the body, reproducing their penalties from year to year, and from ten years to ten years. And the ignorant crime, or the knowing crime, committed when one is yet in his minority, may repent itself and repent its bitterness and its penalty when one is hoary with age. Mere repenting of sin does not dispossess the power of all sins. There are transgressions that throw persons out of the pale of society. There are single acts, the penalties of which never fail to reassert themselves. There are single wrongs that are never healed. This great transgression that seemed in the commission without any threat and without any danger, pursued this man through all his early life, and clear down until he was an old man, and returned from his exile. And even then he was quit of it only by one of those great critical transitions which take place, or may take place, in the life of a man, without which he would have gone on, doubtless, expiating still his great wrong.

And yet God bore no witness. It does not need that God should bear witness against a man that has committed a sin. A man may commit sins, and he may not himself be conscious that he is sinning; at any rate, he may not be conscious of the magnitude of his sins. A man may commit sins, and the customs of society may be so low that he shall not think that he is a great sinner. The sin does not depend upon your estimate of it, or on the estimate which your fellow-men put upon it, but upon its effect upon your constitution, and the constitution of human society.

A man commits transgressions; and years and years go on, and they seem to be buried; but they are not. And the worst of it is, that men's sins when they come to visit them with judgments, choose the

worst possible time to come in. It is then, when a man is broken down otherwise; it is then, when a man is in trouble; it is then, when a man is bankrupt, that they come in. This man or that man, this memory or that memory, this wrong or that wrong, comes upon him. He is in deep bereavements. It is as if a breach had been opened, and all the wrongs of former times were rushing in upon him.

Jacob had had a good time, apparently. So far as his violation between himself and his brother and his father's family was concerned, he had had twenty years of rest. And yet, as with all his abundance he came trooping back to the border to go over into the promised land and take possession of it, there, hovering, haunting the banks of the Jordan, was that old wrong. In that very hour when he could least afford to meet it, when he was most open to it, when all his possessions were in danger of being seized—worse than that, when all that his heart loved lay under the stroke of his adversary—that was the time that his sin came back to meet him.

And so it is yet. There are a great many sins that men think to be very sinful, which, being committed, pass away. Men are more afraid of conventional sins than they are of real ones. There is many and many a man who does not feel when he with bitter hatred lances venomously his neighbor's reputation that that is any great sin. There is many a man that burns with cruel anger who does not think that that is any great sin. There is many a man that covets with a greedy eye and a fiery longing that which is his neighbor's, who does not think that that is any great sin. There is many a man that will break his word with his neighbor, that will break pact and faith with men, who does not think that that is any great sin. There is many a man that is a supplanter, that undermines his neighbors, that takes the foundation out from under them, and sees them toppling and falling to the ground, who does not count that a great sin. If he had broken Sunday, he would have been scared to death! If he had broken a day, that has no bones in it; if he had broken a day which is a man's servant; or if going into the church he had committed any error among the saints; if he had broken any of the harness of religion, or soiled it, he would have felt sore. But to touch men; to touch them in the marrow of their life; to touch their name, and their property; to violate the great law of love, and so to violate every nerve which runs through God's organized universe—in committing these sins men seldom feel that they have committed any great sin. But by and by their transgressions begin to come back upon them. They have forgotten them. They have not labeled them, they have not kept any account of them; but they begin to come—misfortune after misfortune; trouble after trouble. Sometimes the shadow of sin itself rests upon them. Sometimes the sense

of reputation lost comes. Sometimes there are distinct memories that return. But often there is only the cloudy haze, the vague and general sense of trouble, trouble, trouble. And men frequently bemoan themselves, complain, and wonder why their way is so beset. Oh! hear them talk about a selfish world. Selfish they have been. Hear them talk about misfortunes. Misfortunes? *Retribution!* Hear them talk about God's penalty of some, and neglect of others. God has not neglected you. He is after you with a whip of scorpions, as your sins deserve. Men's sins find them out. And though you put as far as between Palestine and Assyria between you and them; though your sins slumber for years and years, they will have a resurrection on earth. I do not believe that any man commits in this world any sin against the fundamental laws of his body, or against the laws of human society, by which men are knit together in faith and love, and goes unpunished, even in this world. It does not touch the question of the other. This is a primary and lower and organized arrangement, quite independent of divine and arbitrary penalties in the life to come. It is not safe, therefore, for those who have choice in this matter to trifle with right or wrong. Men are afraid to commit vices, because they are afraid of losing their places; that is, something visible. They are afraid to commit crimes, because they are afraid of the law, and are afraid of disgrace. But ah! sins are dangerous things, and they are dangerous in this world, too. Vices are dangerous, and crimes are dangerous, and so are sins dangerous; and no man can afford to make them his enemies, and populate the future down into which he is going all unarmed and unaware with these dread forms of avenging sins.

When men have been living a wicked life, it is quite possible for them to turn away from it, and it is quite possible for them to be lifted above the effects of it. There is such a thing as a moral elevation that lifts a man up above the moral remuneration of sin; but it only comes by transformation. There is many and many a man who would do well if, when he is brought into great straits of distress by his past conduct, he could but imitate Jacob; but alas! it is easier to imitate him in his sinfulness than in his repentance. Oh! if such men could fall back in prayer upon God. Sometimes they do; but they do not persevere in prayer. Ah! if men could, in the hour of their distress, be honest with themselves, own their transgressions, fall back upon the God of their fathers, and their God, and suffer the Divine Spirit to lift them high above themselves, they might stop the long series; they might break and interrupt the flow of sequences and the penalty. Alas! there are few men that are wise enough to do it. And men who are not made spiritually better by great troubles and afflictions have great reason to fear that they are utterly cast away.

This will show the great folly of small reformation in a man that has committed continuous wrongs. There is nothing but a change of heart that will put a man right with himself, right with society, and right with God. "Let him that stole steal no more," says the Apostle. Let him that has been living in unrighteous indulgence forsake wholly his practices. Let the wicked man forsake his wickedness and turn unto righteousness. God says, all his past wickedness shall not be counted any more. And on the other hand, if the righteous man forsake his righteousness, all the righteousness that he has committed in times past shall not save him from the penalty of new transgressions. If a man have been never so wicked, I do not say that the translation into the spiritual realm by repentance will cure every thing; but I do say, that there are a great many remunerations of sin in this world that will continue to act against a man that may be alleviated—taken away.

The doctrine of regeneration is taught in the New Testament, that a man may be born again—*must*, it is said. Far more gracious is the word *may;* that a man who has been living a brutal, degraded life may stop it and live a higher and a nobler life; that a man who has been living a deceitful, crafty life may clothe himself with simplicity and with truthfulness; that a man who has been living sordid and selfish may grow generous and magnanimous; that a man who has been living a godless life may live in the full fruition of the divine communion; that a man who has been soiled with salacious affections and been living in carnal lusts, a man who has been in debauch, may stop, and stop at once, and may rise to a higher platform, where God shall meet and cleanse him, and his life shall flow like a stream from divine fountains. This doctrine that it is possible for men that have been going on in transgression to stop their wrong and to rise into another sphere, and another atmosphere, is the most blessed doctrine of the New Testament.

Finally, no man need ever despair of past misdoing who is in earnest. There is no man that is suffered to do wrong without check and hinderance. Ten thousand things stop men, interrupt them, throw them upon thoughtfulness. Ten thousand things oblige men to look back, to calculate; to look forward, to anticipate. And when these seasons from God come, if any man is in earnest to do better, there is no reason why he should not. The power of God's angel, the wrestling of God's Spirit, is not only in this far-off history of the patriarch. There is many and many a man with whom this mysterious messenger of God wrestles; and if he be in earnest, if he will not let God's Spirit go except he bless him; if he feels that his life is in the struggle and he will be blest of God, there is no man so bad, no man so wicked, but that he may become pure, and his flesh

return to him again like the flesh of a little child — as in the case of Naaman the leper.

If there are any here who feel as though others might improve and turn back, but as though it was too late for them, as though they had gone too far, as though they had become too old, as though their habits had become too fixed, so far as your own will is concerned, it may be true that you would never be able of yourself to turn to God; but there is a provision in God's bounty by which, by his grace and by his power, you may be cleansed, you may be set free from evil thoughts and imaginations, and your passions may be restrained. A new heart God can give you. That old heart that has been a fountain throbbing, and throbbing, and casting out vile streams, may be taken away, and God's grace may open a new way in your bosom. And from thence shall issue life, and life eternal.

May God grant to some of you, that, as you have had the experience of the early part of the patriarch's life in sin, you may have the experience of the latter part of his life—exaltation and turning to God.

Now I intend to close this sermon by reading the most beautiful spiritualization of this narrative, one of the most charming hymns of any historic narrative, I think, that ever was made in English—one by Charles Wesley, and founded, as you will perceive, wholly on this history. Only he renders it as if it were a modern Christian struggle, with a confession of sin, followed with perfect peace in Christ Jesus.

Come, O thou Traveler unknown,
  Whom still I hold, but can not see,
My company before is gone.
  And I am left alone with thee:
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell thee who I am;
  My sin and misery declare;
Thyself hast called me by my name,
  Look on thy hands and read it there;
But who, I ask thee, who, art thou?
Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

In vain thou strugglest to get free,
  I never will unloose my hold!
Art thou the MAN that died for me?
  The secret of thy love unfold:
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

Wilt thou not yet to me reveal
  Thy new, unutterable name?
Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell;
  To know it now resolved I am:
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

Yield to me now, for I am weak,
  But confident in self-despair;
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak:
  Be conquered by my instant prayer!
Speak, or thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if thy name be Love.

'Tis Love! 'tis Love! thou diedst for me;
  I hear thy whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee;
  Pure, universal love thou art:
To me, to all, thy bowels move—
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

My prayer hath power with God; the grace
  Unspeakable I now receive;
Through faith I see thee face to face;
  I see thee face to face, and live!
In vain I have not wept and strove;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

I know thee, Saviour, who thou art—
  Jesus, the feeble sinner's friend!
Nor wilt thou with the night depart,
  But stay and love me to the end!
Thy mercies never shall remove;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

The Sun of Righteousness on me
  Hath risen with healing in his wings!
Withered my nature's strength, from thee
  My soul its life and succor brings;
My help is all laid up above;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

Contented now, upon my thigh
  I halt, till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weakness, I
  On thee alone for strength depend:
Nor have I power from thee to move:
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

Lame as I am, I take the prey;
Hell, earth, and sin, with ease o'ercome;
I leap for joy, pursue my way,
And, as a bounding hart, fly home,
Through all eternity to prove
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We draw near to thee, our heavenly Father, not as those that need to remind thee; for thou art ever more mindful of us than we are of ourselves. We draw near to thee not as suppliants, as if it were needful every hour to deprecate thy wrath; for thy mercies run before us. We draw near to thee because thou art our friend; because thou hast taught our hearts the blessedness of communion; because we love the sacred peace and the joy which thou dost breathe upon thy people in the communion of prayer. We are lifted far above ourselves. We think better thoughts. We see further and closer. We are more resolved in that which is good. We are more filled with peace as against disturbing passions. We take hold more firmly upon the great ends of life which thou hast revealed. We take more supreme delight in these blessed hours of communion. And all the things which we ask are as nothing compared to the things which we inherit. Although thou givest from day to day our daily bread, and though with food we have raiment and shelter, and though we are sustained in our relations one to another, and in our active labors of life, yet, more than all these is that inward blessing, the communion of the Holy Ghost, and the cleansing influence of thy heart upon ours.

All the hopes which spring up in us whose bright light casts down cheer upon the gloom and despondency of this life; the rest which we have from our struggles with selfishness and with pride; the longings which begin to be gratified; the inspirations which begin to be understood; those anticipations of blessedness which give us a foretaste of that rest which remains for the people of God—these we have found in prayer. And all these mercies and blessings thou dost vouchsafe to those that seek thee diligently.

We thank thee for our own profit in prayer from day to day for many years. Thou, O God! hast lent a listening ear. How many sins come up to thee! How many periods of distress! How many hours of uncertainty! What bereavements! What sharp sorrows that take possession of us! What captivities! What deliverances! What smiles and gladness! What tears and sorrows! What varied experiences have we had in prayer unto thee with our brethren, with our households, with our own souls' wealth in the secrecy of the closet.

It is not a vain thing to call upon thy name. We are witnesses of thy fidelity. Thy promises are more than fulfilled. We, too, can call thee "him who dost exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think." And we render thee thanks for the time that is past, and take comfort for the time that is to come.

We pray that thou wilt grant that we may more and more feed upon prayer. Teach those that should have prayed long ago to begin the neglected lesson and privilege. Draw reluctant souls to thee—they that are burdened; those that have no home; wanderers that have forsaken their Father's house; outcasts, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. Oh! bring near to thee a great company of those who should call thee Father, but only utter thy name to displease thee. Grant that there may be a turning, under the impulse of honor and love and gratitude. Grant that there may be a filial spirit breathed into many prayerless souls; and may they find their way back to God; and finding thee, may they find themselves.

Give rest to all that are disturbed—and yet, not until they find it with thee. Turn away men from their transgressions. Be faithful to them while they sin, and chastise them. Heal them when they repent. Bring, by all thy discipline thy people, and those that are not thine, unto thee. For how faithful are thy mercies! and what mercies are thy judgments!

We thank thee that thou dost love us so that thou wilt chastise us; and we thank thee for every stripe that we have had; for all troubles; for all burdens; for every cross. We thank thee for all those things which in the past we prayed against, and which nevertheless came upon us because it was the will of God.

And now for the future. Thou dost permit us to ask both that things may come and that things may be averted; and yet, evermore we ask in subservience to thy better knowledge. We comprehend all thy desires in one—thy will be done in us, and upon us; in our children, and upon them; in our affairs. We desire to have nothing that thou canst not look upon with pleasure. Smile upon all our ways, and straighten them till thou canst approve. And grant that

thus we may live in the communion of thy spirit, and in thy sacred presence, our sins forgiven, and our hopes constantly growing brighter, until that glorious day shall come, when we shall leave the scenes of care and of temptation, of sin and repentance, here, and rise to the blessedness of thy heavenly kingdom. And there we will give the praise of our salvation to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant to us the spirit of God. Thou art wrestling with many a heart. With us thou hast wrestled; and we have prevailed. Thou hast told us thy name full oft; and we have rejoiced in it—a name of power, a name of glory above every name that is named. Grant, we beseech of thee, that there may be sent to those that are now in need of this transformation of thy Spirit, the wrestling angel. Grant that they may feel their deep want and their necessity, and that they may clasp thee, nor suffer thee to depart till thou dost leave the blessing behind which their souls need. May there be many that shall discover thy name. May it be Love to those that are dying for lack of love.

Go with us to our homes. Go with us through the week. Strengthen us for our duties. And finally, O blessed Saviour! by thy great love bring us safely through the mortal struggle to our heavenly home. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*

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